

SEXTETTE

VERSE TRANSLATIONS
(WITH NOTICES)
FROM THE FRENCH SYMBOLISTS
BY
DOROTHY MARTIN

Eric Nashings

19

OF THIS BOOK

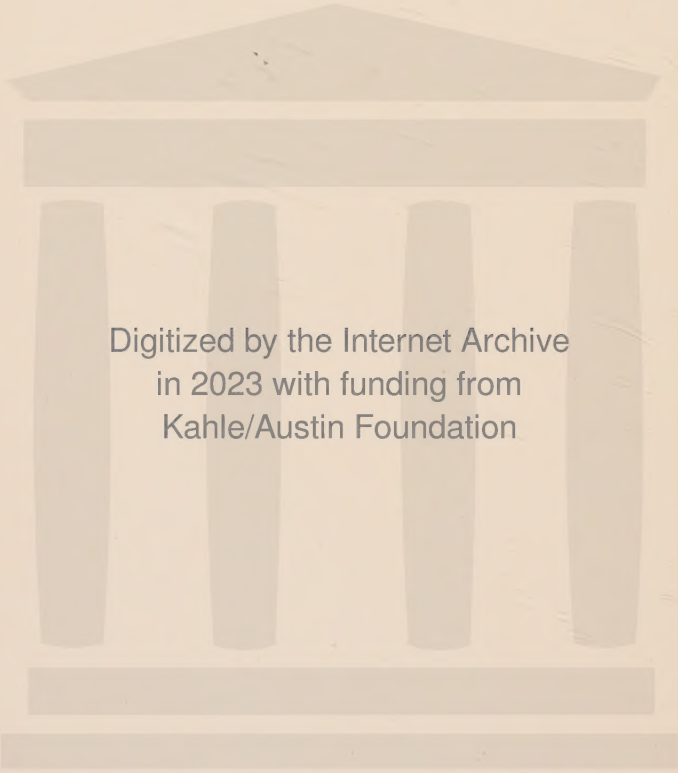
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SEXTETTE



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SEXTETTE

Translations from the French Symbolists

BY

DOROTHY MARTIN

With a Preface by

L. C. MARTIN

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PREFACE

WE talked of translation. I said, I could not define it, nor could I think of a similitude to illustrate it ; but that it appeared to me the translation of poetry could be only imitation.

JOHNSON. ' You may translate books of science exactly. You may also translate history, in so far as it is not embellished with oratory, which is poetical. Poetry, indeed, cannot be translated ; and, therefore, it is the poets that preserve languages ; for we would not be at the trouble to learn a language, if we could have all that is written in it just as well in a translation. But as the beauties of poetry cannot be preserved in any language except that in which it was originally written, we learn the language.'

THUS Dr. Johnson recognized what has become even more obvious since his day, the impossibility of transferring to another tongue, with quite different idioms and word-associations, all those overtones and undercurrents of significance with which, rather than with the more superficial and definable meanings of words, the best poetry is most often concerned. We may go further and maintain that the experience which a poem represents to its author cannot be exactly reproduced even in readers of the original text, and indeed that no two persons are likely to take exactly the same impression from it. And these considerations may encourage us to face the issue raised by Boswell in a less absolute spirit ; asking, not whether the exact translation of poetry is possible but whether a poem can be re-expressed in another language in such a way that the original experience may still be usefully approached. In deciding about this question the works of the French 'symbolists' might be used as a touchstone ; for there

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have been no more zealous exponents of poetic 'suggestion,' no artists in words less primarily concerned with the more palpable kinds of logical sequence; and thus the appearance of even moderate success in an English rendering might serve to re-open the dispute as to whether attempts to 'translate' poetry can be thought worth while.

It is not, however, the aim of the present volume to furnish material for controversy, but rather, even at the risk of providing a further warning to translators, to give greater currency in the English-speaking world to poems of which not only the artistic quality and historical significance but also the difficulties of interpretation have often been admitted. It may be true that we sometimes learn foreign tongues in order to read foreign poetry—'it is the poets that preserve languages'—but many who have acquired a wide knowledge of French have found that in the present instance the understanding which should result does not immediately follow; and indeed French readers themselves have confessed that the poetry of the symbolists is often beyond their comprehension. In such circumstances a conscientious attempt first to transfer into English verse the prevailing spirit of this poetry and then, so far as possible, to catch and enshrine the underlying mental processes, the 'meaning,' with the peculiarities of imagery and diction and the rhythmical nuances by which the meaning is largely conveyed, should have some value at least as an initiation into the mysteries of the originals. Whatever its own artistic merits or shortcomings it should perform some of the functions of

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a commentary and enable the student of French poetry to feel more at home in this world of glancing lights and wavering shadows. At the same time it would be a fault if in the translation it were sought to explain with intrusive precision, to impose a logical clarity which was not intended in the original poems.

The special significance of the French symbolists for students of English literature is a theme that might profitably be investigated. With some justice, but with too little discrimination, they have often been regarded as a perverse and wholly eccentric sect, representing a backwater rather than a current in the main stream of modern poetry. But they were not merely destructive and 'decadent.' They heralded and prepared the way for much that is most distinctive in the poetry of the twentieth century. It is no more easy to define 'symbolism' in this connection than to define Romanticism, of which it is an aspect and perhaps the extreme manifestation, or to define Poetry itself, of which it claimed to reach and record the essence. But these poets, divergent as their aims often were, united in a particular interest in the more subtle and complex of mental phenomena, in those crepuscular regions of the mind which science has since designated as the realm of the 'unconscious.' They were dreamers above all things and intent to give to their poetry the dream quality; and in this and other ways they came to sound new depths and open up new tracks which more recent poetry, as well as more recent science, has found it attractive to explore. They were united also in their 'metaphysical' bias, allying them not only again

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with many of our English poets of to-day, but with such as Donne and Vaughan and all those poets of the seventeenth century who felt the lure of mystery and whose frequent ' quaintness ' and alleged extravagance are often justified not by the mere novelty of fancy but by the implied appreciation of the ironies and paradoxes which experience has to offer—their playing with even the repellent and the macabre having its ground in a perception of the possible contacts as well as the obvious contrasts of carnal with spiritual things, of sense experience with what may be thought to transcend it. The transcendentalism of the symbolists is sometimes comparable with that of Shelley ; they, too, could think that

in this life
Of error, ignorance, and strife,
Where nothing is, but all things seem,
And we the shadows of the dream,

It is a modest creed, and yet
Pleasant if one considers it,
To own that death itself must be,
Like all the rest, a mockery.

More often they were perplexed and anguished by the shifting, impermanent attributes of their experience, and a profound ennui or pessimism characterizes their reactions. But at all times they were interested in the evanescent and the indefinable, and something of the instability which they found in phenomena passed into the form of their poetry, accounting, in some measure, not only for their cult of vaporous and volatile effects in imagery but for their willing departures from the normal in grammar, vocabulary and versification. Not

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only the unique fleeting moment, but precisely its fleeting quality was to be conveyed ; for which requirement the established procedures in poetry often seemed inadequate, and a new ' impressionistic ' technique had to be devised. How far their influence may be definitely traced and ' analysed out ' in modern English verse is a matter calling for more detailed examination than can be made here. But it is not difficult to think of modern instances suggesting that the influence has been more profound, pervasive, and lasting than is commonly realized.

Another question which may relevantly be raised here is that of the indebtedness of the French symbolists to earlier English as well as to earlier French literature, and especially to that of our Romantic period. It was characteristic of the analytical French genius, when faced with the poetry of such as Rimbaud, Mallarmé, and Laforgue, to invent for it a label which, however vague in its connotation, implied clearly enough that something new was being done ; and it was characteristic of English sympathizers to concede the claim to novelty without marking sufficiently the essential relationship between these foreign proceedings and some of the more peculiar features of English Romanticism, the noticeable affinities, for instance, between de Nerval, Baudelaire, and Rimbaud on the one hand, and Coleridge, de Quincey, and Beddoes on the other. The example of Keats and of Byron may easily be thought to have entered, directly or not, into the inspiration of the symbolists ; the influence of Edgar Allan Poe is recognized ; and it is surely a fact of some significance

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that all the poets represented in the present volume had some first-hand acquaintance with English literature. It seems improbable that all the community of interest and expression which may be discerned stands for nothing more than an independent parallel development.

What is more distinctive of the French symbolists, though here again the precedent of William Blake suggests itself, is their greater negligence of reasonable processes of thought, their frequently deliberate cult of difficulty and vagueness of utterance in a degree that seems to require the services of a commentator. Their belief that truth was more accessible through the senses, through intuitions and dreams, than through more palpable kinds of demonstration had peculiar and sometimes disastrous consequences. The world to which all true romantic poetry introduces us is admittedly not the world of common experience, and its remoteness and bizarrerie can often be conveyed only in phraseology and rhythmical ordonnance that are correspondingly strange. It remained, however, for an admirer of the symbolists, de Wyzewa, to claim that 'the absolute value of a work of art is always inversely proportional to the number of persons who can understand it.' That was a hard and extreme saying, and the sentiment was scarcely a general axiom of the school. But the symbolists as a whole were constantly in danger of failure in the matter of communication, of falling into the dull obscurity which lies in wait for the obscurantist. At best, however, their efforts are justified by their results. Their explorations into the more delicate,

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though less definable significances which words, cunningly disposed, may convey, led to a true and permanent enlargement of the poetic horizon.

The meaning of 'symbolism' being disputable, it is natural to find differences of opinion as to the identity of its pioneers and prophets. The term 'symbolist' has been applied to other and later poets than those whose works have been drawn upon to make this anthology, to such as Jean Moréas, Francis Vielé-Griffin, Henri de Régnier, and Paul Valéry. But in these there may be found more admixture of alien elements, Henri de Régnier, for instance, having also been claimed, not unreasonably, as a belated Parnasian; and for the present purpose, which is rather illustrative than exhaustive, there seem to be good grounds for associating de Nerval, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Rimbaud, Verlaine, and Laforgue in a sort of esoteric circle, the first two as the chief fore-runners in France of the symbolist movement, the others as the trustees of what is most essential in it, and as having provided the most signal evidence of its right to exist.

L. C. MARTIN.

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GÉRARD DE NERVAL

1808-1855

GÉRARD DE NERVAL

*Cloud-towers by ghostly masons wrought,
A gulf that ever shuts and gapes,
A hand that points, and palled shapes
In shadowy thoroughfares of thought. . . .*

(In Memoriam : TENNYSON)

GÉRARD Labrunie, who wrote under the pseudonym of Gérard de Nerval, was born in Paris in 1808. His father was a surgeon, at that time attached to the Grand Army. In 1810 his mother died in Silesia where she had followed her husband on the Austrian Campaign. Gérard was brought up by an eccentric grand-uncle at Mortefontaine in the Ile-de-France. There he had access to a small library of occult books ranging from ancient theology, through medieval legend and magic, to more recent eighteenth-century studies of the supernatural. The effect of this early reading was profound on the mind of a solitary boy with an inherent leaning towards mysticism. It was not lessened by the later influence of Paris in the full glow of the romantic movement. As he grew up, the bounds of reality were enlarged by him to include many extravagant musings wherein he thought to grasp memories of past existences. When he fell in love it was after the manner of Dante and Petrarch, with the personification of an ideal. Of this ideal, he caught a glimpse, or had a vision, during some village revel of his boyhood. He saw this vision, whom he calls Adrienne, only once, but he never forgot her. And after her death, his search for her was

not abandoned, but more ardently pursued. In his poems she appears under many forms, for in his mind she was mingled with the women of mythology and legend, as she was also with at least two women who invaded the experience of his later life. The first of these was Jenny Colon, the actress, Aurelia of his writings. She was attracted by him, but flung back by the realization that she was only one incarnation in a chain of which the older links were infinitely more precious to her lover. After his rupture with her, de Nerval found reality becoming less and less tolerable for him. His eccentricities drew nearer to madness. At this time, as twice later on, his friends were forced to place him in the security of an asylum. Released from it, he led a vagabond life, wandering in Germany, Italy and the East, but returning from time to time to Paris. In the East he met the second woman who was profoundly to move his mature imagination. She was a beautiful young Druse, Saléma, who lived with her father, a sheik, near Mount Lebanon. In her, also, de Nerval found a line of incarnations, of whom the dearest to him was again the Adrienne of his boyhood. He would have become an initiate of the cult, and have married her, had not a fever, connected by him with an ill-omened scarab, driven him westwards. He returned to Paris, where he took up his vagabond life, with occasional plunges through Europe. His financial position had become very precarious ; he even suffered great privation, but was too proud to acknowledge it or accept help. On a winter morning early in 1855 he was found, destitute, hanging from the bar of a window,

outside a doss-house to which he had been refused admittance, in a foul Parisian alley near the Seine.

Gérard de Nerval's poetry, like his life, bears witness to the ever-strengthening spell cast upon him by mystery and the inscrutable. His early *Odelettes* sought to recapture the simple sentiment of the medieval ballads. They were written under the influence of Ronsard's fluid rhythms, and revived a fresher and more gracious note of lyricism, which was, in its turn, to inspire Verlaine. Already in them was indicated de Nerval's preoccupation with spiritual adventure and with the past. His tendency to fuse past and present in a transcendental unity appeared more strongly in *Sylvie*, a prose idyl. In *Le Rêve et la Vie*, the story of his madness, he told how the disorders of his brain had momentarily harmonized for him all the discords of the universe. Gradually the search after such a harmony absorbed all the efforts of his mind. At their clearest, his thoughts were a disordered and uncontrolled medley of images, but over them he strove to throw the order of a passionate desire for synthesis. The poetical expression of this desire is to be found in the thirteen sonnets of *Les Chimères*. Their thought is obscure, their imagery chaotic, yet they glimpse that unity which was to de Nerval's overwrought brain the ultimate reality.

Through trying thus to seize the unseizable, he became the initiator of an oracular poetry, penetrated with symbolism. Deserting the French ideals of clarity and reason, his later poetry explored the darker workings of the consciousness, was instinct with emotive suggestion and charged with a new music which was in itself

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meaning. The influence of this poetry on later writers, both directly and through Baudelaire, was profound. The sonnets in which de Nerval developed it most fully have come to be regarded as the keystone of the Symbolist movement.

FANTASY

(Fantaisie)

*There is an ancient air dearer to me
Than all Rossini, Weber and Mozart,
An air whose languorous cadence mournfully
Twines its most secret charms about my heart.*

*And each time that I hear its plaintive notes
Two hundred years are from my spirit rolled :
Louis Thirteenth is King . . . Before me floats
A verdurous hill-side tinged with sunset's gold :*

*A spacious house of brick patterned in stone
Enchants my eyes, with windows royal-hued,
Set in a pleasure-garden's flowery zone,
By a meandering river fondly wooed :*

*And then a lady, at her casement dreaming,
Dark-eyed and pale, an old-world vision, she
Who, in some other life perhaps, passed gleaming
Before my eyes—to haunt my memory !*

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WITHIN THE WOOD

(Dans les bois)

*In spring the bird is born to sing :
—Hast never barked to his mood ? . . .
'Tis a pure, simple, touching thing
The bird's song—far within the wood !*

*As summer comes he seeks a mate ;
He loves, and finds that love is good.
How peaceful, true, affectionate
Is the bird's nest—within the wood !*

*When autumn mists go creeping by,
His notes are still—ere leaves are strewed.
Ah, may it too come happily,
The bird's death—deep within the wood.*

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LOVE-SONG

(Chant d'amour)

*Here we know
Days enchanted,
See grief go
From hearts care-haunted
Quick as flow
Of waves that flaunted.*

*And we seize
Each trifling hour.
Passion is
Desire in flower
And swiftly flees
When pleasure's o'er !*

GÉRARD DE NERVAL

DELPHICA

Ultima Cumæi venit jam carminis ætas.

*Do you remember, Daphne, the ancient lay,
Love's world-old song, that 'neath the sycamore,
'Neath trembling willow, myrtle, laurel hoar,
Or olive-tree, is born anew each day ?*

*The temple with its columns' vast array,
The bitter fruit from which you scarce forbore ?
And the dread grot, guarding its fatal lore,
Where dreams the dragon's seed its years away ?*

*They will return once more, the gods you mourn,
The ancient order on Time's wings be borne ;
Earth thrills even now with the prophetic throe. . . .*

*—Yet lies the Roman sibyl, buried deep,
Beneath the Arch of Constantine asleep :
And naught disturbs the classic portico.*

GÉRARD DE NERVAL

GOLDEN NUMBERS

(*Vers dorés*)

What then ! all things are sentient !

PYTHAGORAS.

*Claim not, O Man, thought's whole dominion yours,
When Life prevails in each created thing !
Though your own powers bow to your governing,
Yet the world waits outside your council-doors.*

*Suffer the brutish mind that feebly soars,
Heed in the flower the spirit blossoming.
Mysteries of love within the metal cling ;
' All things are sentient ! ' Strength from all things pours.*

*Fear, in blind walls, the insistent gaze of eyes :
Since will, in humblest matter, lies concealed,
See that beneath no impious sway it groans.*

*For oft a god is hid in mean disguise,
And, even as sight by shuttering lids is sealed,
Pure souls may dwell beneath the crust of stones.*

GÉRARD DE NÉVAL

ARTEMIS

*The Thirteenth Shade is but the first again ;
The first, the sole, as time's sole moment now.
If thou art queen, then first or last thy reign ?
If king, then last or only lover thou ?*

*Court the wan wooer, of all mortals fain,
—So may you garner best your love's return—
Death or the Dead, art thou, Delight or Pain,
Within whose hands the red rose-mallows burn ?*

*Dark-visaged goddess clasping fiery rods
Of crimson blooms, Gudula's blazonry,
Where reels thy cross mid the spheres' far-flung race ?*

*Fall, light-hued roses, you insult our gods ;
From brazen skies, pale ghosts, descend.—For me
The mournful Venus of the Unfathomed Place.*

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EL DESDICHADO

*Mine is the Stygian gloom of grief profound :
Prince-like I mourn my desolated towers :
Dead is my star : my lute's cerulean showers
By Melancholy's sombre Sun are crowned.*

*Bring thou, to comfort me, beyond Death's bound,
Posilipo, Tyrrhenian Sea, the bowers
Where fruited vine weds with the rose's flowers,
The bloom that solaced when dark sorrow drowned.*

*Love, Phœbus, am I ? . . . Lusignan, Biron ? . . .
My brow with the queen's kiss is still agleam,
Within the syren's cave I wove my dream,*

*And twice, triumphant, traversed Acheron,
Drawing from Orphean lyre alternately
Music of elfland and saints' ecstasy.*

GÉRARD DE NERVAL

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

1821-1867

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

*... the fierce light of a blazing misery, that rests not for matins or for
vespers—for noon of day or noon of night—for ebbing or for flowing
tide...*

(Suspiria de Profundis : DE QUINCEY)

CHARLES Baudelaire, born in Paris in 1821, was the only son of his father's second marriage. François Baudelaire was sixty-one at the time of his son's birth, vigorous, artistic, pleasure-loving. An air of pre-revolution elegance lingered about him; Revolution, Empire, and Restoration alike had found him successful and surrounded with friends. His second wife, thirty-four years younger than himself, was born in London whither her parents had fled from the Reign of Terror. She was nervous, serious and puritanically religious. Of this curiously ill-assorted pair Baudelaire later declared himself to be the 'produit contradictoire.' Certainly he shared with his half-brother a cruel legacy in the paralysis which overtook them both. After the death of his father in 1827, Baudelaire enjoyed a short spell of extreme happiness during which he had his mother exclusively to himself. This was rudely shattered when, in 1828, she married General Aupick, whose regime of strict discipline was at once applied to his stepson. Baudelaire was sent to be educated at Lyons, and later went to a college in Paris, from which he was expelled in 1839. He rapidly became more and more estranged from his home. For years he had assumed an attitude of revolt; he now

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began to encourage a legend of evil about himself. When, at twenty-one, he came into his fortune, he elaborated, in a further endeavour to prick and astonish the world, a cult of what he called 'dandysme'; this, in spite of Byronic qualities, was much less epicurean than might be supposed. In the following years the separate poems of *Les Fleurs du Mal* began to circulate from hand to hand among the coteries of artistic Paris, and the legend of their author grew apace. Meanwhile Baudelaire's fortune was all expended. Years of misery followed, during which even his mother, exasperated by his intractability and shocked by his poems, did not reply to his requests. In 1857 a friend undertook the publication of his volume. But publication, instead of bringing him the honour for which he hoped, quickly involved both his publisher and himself in a prosecution by the state for offence against religion and public morals. On the second charge he was condemned to a fine of three hundred francs, and the suppression of six offending poems was ordered. Baudelaire took this blow very hardly, for, in spite of his cult of singularity in life, he had striven scrupulously to make his art, however singular, a faithful record of his inner experience. Shortly afterwards, disregarding the warnings of his friends, he put forward his candidature for an empty chair in the Academy. Failure was a foregone conclusion. A little later poverty drove him, among other expedients, to undertake a lecturing tour in Belgium; but this also had no success. In Belgium he had his first bad seizure; he returned to Paris, where, after eighteen months' illness, he died in 1867.

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

Baudelaire's position as an artist, especially in foreign countries, is somewhat equivocal. His fame, like Byron's, has flown first on the wings of an evil reputation; and has been enhanced later by the fact that his language, apparently strong and direct in spite of its refinements, carries more easily than most into foreign lands. In judging such poets it is difficult even now to get away from the crowding associations which have grown up around their names. The poetry of Baudelaire is lyrical in essence and classical in form. His lines have been compared with those of Racine for their purity and restrained effectiveness. But where the earlier classical writers were analytical and rhetorical, Baudelaire is more obviously suggestive and musical. When he is describing outward form it is from the point of view of the inner, reflective mind which saturates it with association and atmosphere. His poetry is, therefore, necessarily penetrated with his own mental preoccupations, his modern questioning, his morbid philosophy. Evil, frenzy, satiety, perversion as they exist and work in the mind have a fascination for him which he is unable, probably also unwilling, to cast off; a fascination peculiarly disturbing because he sees at the same time quite clearly that these things make for impotence and lead to remorse:

And with each face thou sawest the shadow on each,
Seeing as men sow men reap.

Thus, paradoxically, although Baudelaire paid dearly for the right of the artist to pursue truth without regard for moral consequences, his work is full of imprecations levelled against the evil which he has been supposed to

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

foster. ' Could we not find,' said the advocate for his defence, ' the same thoughts and often the same expressions in the homilies of some rude, severe father of the Church ? ' Truly enough Baudelaire was, in his portrayal of vice, capable of a medieval violence. He could use, too, the well-worn romantic phrases in the service of his darker cult. But the factors of his genius which perhaps most need emphasizing are his generous emotions of human compassion, his sincere interest in the significance rather than the appearance of things, and his endeavour to make poetry express, not only directly but more especially through the resources of sound and rhythm, the most elusive subtleties of the mind.

HYMN TO BEAUTY

(Hymne à la Beauté)

*From heaven or hell, O Beauty, come you hence ?
Out from your gaze, infernal and divine,
Pours blended evil and beneficence,
And therefore men have likened you to wine.*

*Sunset and dawn within your eyes are fair ;
Stormlike you scatter perfume into space ;
Your kiss, a philtre from an amphora rare ;
Charms boys to courage and makes heroes base.*

*Whence come you, from what spheres or inky deeps,
With careless hand joy and distress to strew ?
Fate, like a dog at heel, behind you creeps ;
You govern all things here, and naught you rue.*

*You walk upon the dead with scornful glances,
Among your gems Horror is not least fair,
Murder, the dearest of your baubles, dances
Upon your haughty breast with amorous air.*

*Mothlike around your flame the transient, turning,
Crackles and flames and cries, ' Ah, heavenly doom ! '
The quivering lover o'er his mistress yearning
Is but a dying man who woos his tomb.*

*From heaven or the abyss ? Let questioning be,
O artless monster wreaking endless pain,
So that your smile and glance throw wide to me
An infinite that I have loved in vain.*

HYMN TO BEAUTY

*From Satan or from God ? Holy or vile ?
Let questioning rest—O soft-eyed sprite, my queen,
O rhythm, perfume, light—so you beguile
Time from his slothfulness, the world from spleen.*

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

EVENING'S HARMONY

(*Harmonie du soir*)

*Now comes the hour when, in the quivering light,
Each flower to heaven exhales, a censer fair ;
Perfume and sound wheel in the evening air,
A mournful waltz, a languorous, whirling flight !*

*Each flower to heaven exhales, a censer fair ;
The violin sobs, a soul in sorrowing plight ;
A mournful waltz, a languorous, whirling flight !
The sky, sad, lovely tomb, knows not of care.*

*The violin sobs, a soul in sorrowing plight,
A heart too tender for the void's dark lair.
The sky, sad, lovely tomb, knows not of care.
The sun sinks, drowned in his own blood, from sight. . . .*

*A heart too tender for the void's dark lair
Gathers each memory of all past delight.
The sun sinks, drowned in his own blood, from sight, . . .
And in my soul you shine, a monstrance rare !*

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

SPLEEN

My memories make a thousand years seem few.

*A huge bureau, stuffed with old billets-doux,
Law-papers, verses, ballads, balance-sheets,
With coils of heavy hair wrapped in receipts,
Hides fewer secrets than my mind's dark tome.
Like a great pyramid or catacomb
This holds more dead than any common plot.
—I am a graveyard the moon visits not,
Where, like remorse, the long worms creep and spread,
Feeding for ever on my dearest dead.
I am a boudoir full of faded flowers,
Where lie the fashions of forgotten hours,
Where even the plaintive pastels, Bouchers pale,
Of emptied vials breathe the perfume frail.*

*Naught could there be longer than these maimed days
When, 'neath the snowy years' thick-falling maze,
Spleen, of indifference the mournful flower,
Grows more immortal through each lingering hour.
—Henceforward all the living world I hold
But as a rock round which vague fears unfold
As in Sabara's dust it sleeps alone,
An ancient sphinx, to heedless worlds unknown,
From charts forgot, whose mood, ferocious, shy,
Responds to naught save to the evening sky.*

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

A MOURNFUL MADRIGAL

(*Madrigal triste*)

*Ah, what to me though you be wise,
So you be fair, so you be sad ?
Tears lend allurement to your eyes,
For streams are sweet where'er they rise :
Storms make the drooping blossoms glad.*

*I love you best when all delight
Down from your darkening brow is cast,
When your heart drowns in horror's night,
When all is blotted from your sight
By direful clouds from out the past.*

*I love you when your wide eyes weep
A water warm as though 'twere blood,
When, whilst my hand would bring you sleep,
You cry aloud in anguish deep
As though death bore you towards his flood.*

*Like to celestial harmonies
Profound, voluptuous, apart,
I breathe your sobbing agonies,
And watch the pearls that dewed your eyes
Shedding their gleam within your heart.*

*Your heart wherein, though dispossessed,
Shadows of outworn loves are tossed,
Flames on with forge-like, fierce unrest,
The while you nurture in your breast
Some of the pride that haunts the lost.*

A MOURNFUL MADRIGAL

*Yet in so far, love, as your dream
Never has plunged you deep as hell,
Since ne'er, on nightmare's eddying stream
Where lust is hot for weapon's gleam,
For powder's havoc, poison's spell,*

*Where all men are shut out as foes,
Evil is read in every fate,
Where, shuddering, chimes each hour that goes,
Have you felt all about you close
The clutch of comprehensive Hate ;*

*Therefore, my slave-queen, you may not,
Who mix with fear love's offering,
Tell me amid night's noisome blot
With urgent clamour heart-begot
' I am your equal, O my King ! '*

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

CONTEMPLATION

(Recueillement)

*Be wise, calm now your heart, O my Despair.
Evening you craved ; it falls with soft caress.
The gathering mists, that bring to some distress,
To others peace, obscure the city's glare.*

*While the base multitudes, close-herded there
By Pleasure's scourge murderous and merciless,
Store up remorse beneath their festal dress,
Let us, dear Sorrow, find a finer air,*

*That we may see the Years in their dead guise
Lean from the golden bar of Paradise,
Regret surge up from out the deep, unbowed,
And, 'neath an arch, the Sun's declining flight ;
Then, as it eastward creeps like far-flung shroud,
Hear, O my soul, the sweet advancing Night.*

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ

1842-1898

STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ

Words must embroider, be twisted and spun, like silk or golden hair.

(Gaston de Latour : WALTER PATER)

STÉPHANE Mallarmé was born in Paris in 1842. His antecedents had for many generations been connected with the Department of Registration. The family had also from time to time shown literary preoccupations. Mallarmé was educated with a view to a government appointment. His studies began at an aristocratic school at Auteuil and finished at the Lycée de Sens. At the age of twenty, however, influenced by his English studies and by the works of Poe, he spent some time in England ; and when he returned to France it was to become a teacher of English. Until 1873 he taught in the south, notably at Besançon and Avignon. In that year he graduated into a college in Paris. Already he had published many poems in different reviews. In 1874 his prose translation of Poe's poem, *The Raven*, appeared in book form. In Paris he became the close friend of the painter, Manet, with whom he used to attend Victor Hugo's stately dinners, where he was invariably greeted as 'mon cher poète impressioniste.' It was Manet who illustrated in 1876 the small, costly edition of *L'Après-midi d'un Faune*. In 1884 Huysmans' novel, *A Rebours*, whose hero lived under the spell of Mallarmé's poetry, was published. The novel did much to establish Mallarmé's reputation and to bind closely to him the younger men who already tended to consider him as a leader. In spite of his retiring and

STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ

reflective habits, Mallarmé received during many years these young disciples every Tuesday in his house in the Rue de Rome. A discerning and sympathetic host, ready to encourage with disinterestedness and subtlety the cult of ideas, he yet remained to some extent spiritually aloof, a master to be worshipped and followed with respect. In 1895 he retired from his long career as teacher and withdrew to his house at Valvins near Fontainebleau. Released at last from those 'linguistic labours whose daily interruption drew a never-failing wail from my noble poetical faculty,' he turned arduously to his literary work. But his years of leisure were few. He died at Valvins in 1898.

In his early poetry Mallarmé was greatly influenced by Poe and Baudelaire. He even strove to follow these writers into paths of gloom foreign to the cast of his powers. After he had found more truly his own fragile, evocative vein, which appears, however, as early as *Apparition*, he began consciously and deliberately, to evolve a method and approach calculated to yield a highly concentrated poetry. It was not merely subtlety of expression at which he aimed. It was subtlety pure and for its own sake, undefiled by the elucidations usually acceded in order to make it appreciable. Round his poetic impulse Mallarmé developed the associations which clung to it when it first arose within his mind ; not pruning them away in favour of a logical presentation, but exquisitely and elliptically rendering them in order to reproduce the essence of the original in its individuality and complexity. This method, employed on a cast of thought whose currency

STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ

was the symbolic, produced poetry necessarily difficult. Its finest flowers, perhaps, where subject and method are admirably matched, are the splendid fragment, *Hérodiade*, and the long poem, *L'Après-midi d'un Faune*, both belonging to his middle period. The later sonnets are very obscure; it is only occasionally that thought emerges. For Mallarmé was now working in accordance with his later theory that a poem should be a design in assonance. He believed that the time had come to use each word for the music and the delicate suggestions radiating from it in ever-widening circles, which, intersecting the circular systems of the other words, made of the whole a beautiful and satisfying design. From the ethereal essence thus arrived at, the grosser matter of content had been removed. The same might be said of his later prose, which in many ways belongs rightly to the sphere of poetry. Although Mallarmé thus explored many new and beautiful avenues of expression, he never deserted, in writing poetry, a formal framework. With free verse he had no traffickings. The general quality of his work is that of a 'poets' poet,' remote from the ordinary reader. On the younger writers who have grown up after him, however, he continues to exert a potent influence, both as a delicate artist and as an interesting theorist on the subject of poetry.

APPARITION

*The moon grew mournful. Seraphs tearfully
Dreaming, with bow in hand, mid vapoury
Quiet of flowers, from quavering viols drew
Forth silvery sobs slurring the petals' dew.
—Of your first kiss it was the hallowed day.
My musings, fain to make me torture's prey,
Breathed cunningly the fumes of woe that even
Without regret or aftermath may leaven,
For him that culls, the culling of a dream.
I strayed and saw naught but the paving's gleam
When with sun-aureoled hair, there in the street
And in the night, you with your laughter sweet
Appeared, and seemed the fairy capped with light
Who oft across my childhood's slumberings bright
Had passed, letting from half-curved fingers flow
Pure clusters of sweet-perfumed stars like snow.*

STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ

THE WINDOWS

(*Les Fenêtres*)

*Tired of the almshouse drear, whose rank fumes crawl
Like incense up the curtains' tedious white
To where the cross sighs on the vacant wall,
The furtive inmate draws himself upright,*

*And, less to warm his gangrenes than to stare
Once more on sunlit stone, drags off to press
His bony features and white forelock where
The windows burn to each ray's bright caress.*

*His feverish lips, of the same ravenous hue
As when he went of old, an amorous swain,
To woo simplicity, greasily dew
In a long bitter kiss the gilded pane.*

*Rapt he remains, nor dose nor time recalls,
Nor bed enforced, nor fear of the last rite,
Nor cough ; and when the glow of evening falls,
His eyes, upon horizons fraught with light,*

*See golden galleys in swan-like beauty sleep
On streams of perfume and of porphyry
Rocking their gleaming prows above a deep
Of heedlessness poignant with memory.*

*Thus, I, contemptuous of man's hardened heart
Spoiled by prosperity, glutted with food
For appetites alone, his chosen part
To gather precious ordures for his brood,*

THE WINDOWS

*Quickly retreat to casements where we still
May turn aside from life ; and there, reborn,
In windows where eternal dews distil,
Where pure and golden gleams the Infinite Morn,*

*I see myself transfigured ! And its beam
—Be the glass art or ecstasy—empowers
Me still to live and bear, gem-like, my dream
Up to the highest heaven where Beauty flowers.*

*But alas ! Earth constrains. Nauseous, her stress
For ever lurks about my shelter's brink,
And the lewd vomitings of Foolishness
Even to the confines of the azure stink.*

*Yet may not I, I to whom sorrow clings,
Break through the crystal smirched by infamy,
And take far flight, on these poor, unfledged wings
—Chancing a fall throughout Eternity ?*

STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ

SEA-WIND

(Brise marine)

*Sad is the flesh, alas ! And cloyed with words
The brain ! To fly ! to fly ! wild as the birds
To be amid strange surfs and unknown skies !
Nothing, not garden pooled in shining eyes,
Will bind this heart drenched in the surge, O Night,
Nor yet my lonely candle with its light
Shed on blank page that pen dare not molest,
Nor tender wife with babe upon her breast.
Seaward I fare ! Ship, with your masts asway,
For an exotic land your anchors weigh !
The Weariness that cruel hopes renew
Still keeps its faith in the last wave of adieu.
These masts, perchance, tempting the storms, may run
Before a wind that mocks at ships undone,
Sinking, forlorn, forlorn, where no isles throng . . .
— Yet, O my heart, list to the seamen's song !*

STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ

THE NOON-DAY OF A FAUN

Eclogue

(L'Après-midi d'un Faune)

THE FAUN

I would those nymphs perpetuate.

*So fair,
Their tender rose, it hovers in the air
Tufted with sleep.*

This love a dream ? And gone ?

*Doubt, a dim hoard from olden night, runs on
In many a subtle branch, which, like the true
Boughs, proves, alas, that lonely I but knew
As prize the perfect blemish of the rose.*

Further I muse . . .

*if they on whom you gloze
Were figments of your fabulous desires !
Faun, vain illusionment from her suspires
Whose eyes are blue and chaste as weeping springs :
But she, who softly sighed, you say she brings
The day's warm airs about your shaggy hide !
No ! in the languid breathless swoons that glide
With stifling heats the fresh dawn to commute,
Gurgles no rill except what spills my flute
To the glade drenched with pipings ; the only air
Save from the twin reeds quick to whisper ere*

THE NOON-DAY OF A FAUN

*It scatters out the notes in arid rain
Is, on the far horizon's calm domain,
The breath of inspiration, cunning, wise,
And unperturbed, remounting to the skies.*

*O calm rapt fen of my Sicilian soil
Which my desires like burning suns despoil
Tacit beneath the jewelled fires, IMPART
'How here I cut the hollow reeds, by art
Tamed ; when, upon the glaucous gold of far
Verdures that votive to the fountains are,
Shimmers a living pearliness asleep :
And how, as my pipes new-born in prelude creep,
A flight of swans, no, naiads ! makes away
Or dives . . . '*

*All burns beneath the hot hour's sway
Nor heeds by what device together flee
The nuptial joys he sought who tunes his key :
Then shall I wake to my first rapture's flight,
Alone, erect, 'neath primal floods of light,
Lily ! and most ingenuous of you all.*

*Far other than the naught their lips let fall,
The soft kiss whispering endless perfidies,
My breast, virgin of proof, deep wounded is
Mysteriously, by some majestic fang :
Away ! in silly trust the secret sang*

THE NOON-DAY OF A FAUN

*To the two reeds, a-tune beneath the sky,
Who, stealing all the anguished ecstasy,
Dream in long loneliness that we beguiled
The scene's perfection with confusions wild
Betwixt itself and our too credulous plaint ;
And high as love may pipe let slowly faint
Away, with all my conjured visionings
Of limpid thighs and flanks of sylvan things,
A phrase, sonorous, melancholy, slight.*

*Stay, Syrinx, impish instrument of flight,
Strive to redeck the pools whereby you wait !
I, of my murmurings proud, will lengthily prate
Of goddesses ; and 'neath the cloaking tone
Of paints idolatrous snatch many a zone :
So, when to banish what my feint but waived
The light of luscious grape my grief has laved,
Laughing, with empty bunch to heaven upraised,
I whistle through the luminous skins, and crazed
With rapture till the evening gaze aslant.*

*O nymphs once more let swelling MEMORY chant.
' My eyes, piercing the reeds, prick many a shape
Divine ; they, burning, 'neath the wave escape
With ringing cries of rage to woodlands' roof ;
And the splendid float of tresses draws aloof,
O gems, within your shimmering, shuddering flow !*

THE NOON-DAY OF A FAUN

Quick I give chase ; when at my feet twine (so
Hurt by the languorous ill of being twain)
Fair slumberers of their own embraces fain :
I bear them off, nor disenlace, and tear
To thicket, loathed of lighter umbrage, where
Roses to the sun their perfumed lees upyield
And where, like theirs, our revels may be sealed.'
*You I adore, O virginal ire, O shy
Delight of gleaming burden, that would fly
My fiery lips athirst to drain afresh,
As lightnings leap, the dim dreads of the flesh :
Dread of inhuman feet in coy heart whence
Yet flees for evermore all innocence,
Moist with less mournful dews and foolish tears.*
' This my crime ! Gay from vanquishing traitorous
fears
I in disordered rout apart have sent
Those kisses that the gods so aptly blent ;
For scarce my ardent laughter had I thrust
Deep hid in one's glad folds (staying with just
A finger, that her plumey whiteness might
Illumine at her sister's rapturous light,
The little nymph, guileless, that blush ne'er knows)
When from my arms, oppressed by shadowy woes,
The spoil, ungrateful e'er and pitiless,
Slips off nor heeds my sob's tipsy distress.'

*Be't so ! Others to joy will madly wind
With tresses round my satyr-horns entwined :*

THE NOON-DAY OF A FAUN

*Well knows my passion how midst ripened trees
Pomegranates burst to murmurings of bees ;
And our blood, too, charmed by what wakes its fire,
Flows for the eternal swarming of desire.
Late, when these woods with gold and embers blaze
The darkened foliage sings in glad amaze.
Etna ! 'tis towards your slopes whose lavas know
The artless feet of Venus that I go
When sad sleep groans or flame is spent. My goal
The queen !*

O certain doom . . .

No, but the soul,

*Emptied of words, and this dull leaden frame
Succumb at last to noon's proud silent flame :
Naught more ; the blasphemy to oblivion slips,
On thirsty sands stretched out, with parted lips,
Of wine I woo the efficacious star.*

Farewell : I'll seek you where your shadows are.

STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ

WHAT SILKEN SYMBOL ÆONS-OLD

(Quelle soie aux baumes de temps)

*What silken Symbol æons-old
Whereon heraldic Glories die
Could match the artless clouds that lie
Within your mirror, fold on fold ?*

*Far down the avenue behold
Rent flags of Victory dream and sigh :
But I drown eyes of ecstasy
In those bare tresses you unfold.*

*No ! The lips for ever fain
To aspire may naught attain
If, your princely lover, he*

*Within this wave that ebbs and swells,
Quench not, a diamond's brilliancy,
The cry of Triumph that he quells.*

STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ

PAUL VERLAINE

1844-1896

PAUL VERLAINE

*Where music and moonlight and feeling
Are one.*

(An Ariette for Music : SHELLEY)

PAUL Verlaine was born in Metz in 1844. His father was a captain in the Engineers, and the first seven years of Paul's life were spent with his parents, to whom he was always much attached, in garrison towns, Metz, Montpellier, Nîmes, and again Metz. In 1851 his father retired from the army and went to live in Paris. Paul was well educated at a preparatory school and at the Lycée Bonaparte, where he took his Baccalauréat. He began to study law, but at the age of twenty went into an insurance office. From that he passed to a government appointment in the Hôtel-de-Ville, which at that time offered shelter to a small number of literary aspirants such as already he had become. He was soon one of a group who preferred literary discussion in a café of the Rue de Rivoli to the assiduities of minor French finance. In 1865 his father died. In the following year Verlaine published *Poèmes saturniens*, after which his longings for a purely literary career became stronger, and his adherence to the laxities of café life more marked. Irresponsible and impressionable, always at the mercy of the moment, he had unfortunately, throughout his life, no power of resisting the attractions of artificial stimulants, which, once taken, quickly overpowered him. His second publication, *Les Fêtes galantes*, was a collection of charming evoca-

PAUL VERLAINE

tions in words of the art of Watteau and Fragonard. In 1869 he met the only woman who, beyond his mother, ever counted for much in his life. During the year which elapsed before he married her, he wrote the short poems of *La Bonne Chanson*, his epithalamium. Shortly after his marriage he threw up his appointment. Gradually he had become detached from the decent bourgeois atmosphere of his early days and, to some extent, of his natural tastes. Owing to his dissolute habits his marriage was already, in less than a year, a failure when Rimbaud, the young, uncouth poetical prodigy, came to Paris in response to his invitation. Verlaine was fascinated by the adventurous spirit and intellect and by the enormous driving force of his new friend, and soon found in their mutual desire for travel an excuse to fly from an unhappy home. With Rimbaud he spent a couple of years in Belgium and London, during which, however, he never ceased to regret his wife and the short-lived happiness of his marriage. The friendship ended in 1873 with the unfortunate incident in Brussels, when Verlaine, in a drunken fury, fired a revolver twice at Rimbaud, wounding him. During his imprisonment, worked out chiefly at Mons, the poems of his vagabondage, *Les Romances sans paroles*, were published. In prison Verlaine underwent a dramatic religious conversion, which had a great effect on his poetical inspiration though not on his unstable character and conduct. Its literary fruit was the volume of poems entitled *Sagesse*. About this time the separation and, finally, divorce obtained by his wife left him without moorings except for his mother. With

PAUL VERLAINE

the family funds nearly exhausted, he swayed between journalism in Paris and two unsuccessful attempts at Coulommès to cultivate the soil, for which he had a desultory and impractical affection. In 1886 his mother died, and henceforth he had only his literary earnings on which to support his irregular life. He worked at poem and article in all the cafés of the Latin Quarter, but his earnings were not sufficient to keep him from the public hospitals during his illnesses or from very humble lodgings at other times. He died in Paris in 1896.

The influence of the Parnassians and of Baudelaire on the early poetry of Verlaine has perhaps been over-emphasized. For although in many ways *Poèmes saturniens* showed the Parnassian care for clarity and precise form, there was already in such pieces as *Chanson d'Automne* a quickened, subjective note of lyrical inspiration, unknown in the poetry of the time. Gérard de Nerval had tentatively touched this note, but no poet in France had fully attained it since the time of Villon, with whom Verlaine has often been compared. It is a note which, with its unhampered musical flights, its unaffected singing quality, has distinguished the English lyric much more continuously than the French. From the first Verlaine would have nothing to do with sententious and rhetorical language, but framed for himself a fresh, poetical vocabulary out of familiar words and simple phrases. Into this language, not extraordinary in itself, he infused new, delicate emotion, weaving the words at the same time into unfamiliar, soft cadences. Verlaine is an impressionist. He caught

PAUL VERLAINE

the finer shades of sensory reaction and transferred them unerringly into verse. The diaphanous substance of his poetry has less to do with thought than with the music of the words he chooses and his mastery of fluid rhythms. It was in virtue of his qualities of floating imagery and delicate music that he was hailed, no less than Mallarmé, by the Symbolists as their master. Both, unknown to the world, were adored by their own fraternity, Mallarmé respectfully, Verlaine familiarly. In spite of *Art Poétique*, at once precept and example of Symbolist method, Verlaine was little of a theorist. Not even Rimbaud's diatribes could lead him far from his own paths. Verlaine's novelties sprang from the faithful manner with which he followed the inspiration of his senses; what theories he had were formed later to express poetical truth as he had found it. An unaffected diction, music, atmosphere, sensitiveness to the fine shades of evanescent feeling, these are the things of which Verlaine, voicing with the simplicity of a child the complexity of his own rich nature, wrought the dewy freshness of his song.

THE ATTENDANT SPIRIT

(*Mon Rêve familier*)

*Oft comes this dream, strange, intimate, apart,
Of one unknown, my love, and true to me ;
And every time, never the same is she,
Nor other than my love, who knows my heart ;*

*Who knows and cons it o'er with love's true art ;
Only to her, alas, who has the key,
Obscure no more. And my wan misery
Yields when her tears in comfort's cadence start.*

*Dark, fair, or auburn, she ? I cannot tell.
Her name ? The soft, sonorous sound recalls
Lovers whom Life from love too soon has sped.*

*Her gaze is like a statue's in its spell,
And her grave voice, aloof and quiet, falls,
An echo of the voices of the dead.*

PAUL VERLAINE

AUTUMN DIRGE

(*Chanson d'Automne*)

*In sobbing tones
Of violin, moans
Autumn's breath,
Wounding my heart
With languorous art
Drear as death.*

*Stifled and faint
At sad complaint
Of time outworn,
On distant years
I muse, and tears
Fall forlorn.*

*And I, resigned
To evil wind
Fraught with grief,
Am whirled about
In endless rout
Like withered leaf.*

PAUL VERLAINE

MOONLIGHT

(Clair de Lune)

*Your soul is like a sylvan scene where pass
To sound of lute and dancing charmingly
Masquers and bergamasquers, all, alas,
Half-wistful 'neath their guise of fantasy.*

*Chanting a minor melody's distress
In praise of conquering love and fortune's chance
Scarcely they seem to feel their happiness,
As their song mingles with the moonlight's trance,*

*With the calm moonlight sad and silvery
That charms the birds within the boughs to dream
And breaks with sobs the slender ecstasy
Of fountains plashing to the marble's gleam.*

PAUL VERLAINE

MOON'S SILVER FIRE

(*La lune blanche*)

*Moon's silver fire
Steals through the wood ;
The boughs conspire,
Their voices brood
In gathering night . . .*

O heart's delight.

*In argent face
Of pool is thrown
The shadowy grace
Of willow lone
Where the winds sigh . . .*

Fair dreams, draw nigh.

*Now quiet descends,
Assuaging, slow,
From far-flung ends
Of skies aglow
With opal dower . . .*

'Tis rapture's hour.

PAUL VERLAINE

NOW IS RAPTURE'S LANGUOROUS MOOD

(*C'est l'extase languoureuse*)

The wind's refrain
Faints on the plain.

FAVART.

*Now is rapture's languorous mood,
Now love's tender lassitude,
Now the shivering woodlands thrill
To the breeze's light caress,
And in the branches' duskiness
Small voices carol, thin and shrill.*

*O the murmurings fresh and frail
That purl and whisper, sigh and fail !
They are gentle as if sung
By the field-grass, zephyr-stirred,
Faint as chimes, in fancy heard,
That pebbles ring the waves among.*

*And the soul that drowsily
Chants within this melody
Is none other than our own.
My soul, is it not, and yours,
Whose lowly litany outpours
Through the warm night its quiet tone ?*

PAUL VERLAINE

CARE FALLS WITHIN MY HEART

(Il pleure dans mon cœur)

The rain falls softly on the town.

ARTHUR RIMBAUD.

*Care falls within my heart
As the rain upon the town.
Tell me from whence thou art,
Languor, that fills my heart ?*

*How softly sings the rain
Falling on roofs and ground !
To a heart dulled with pain
O sweet the sound of the rain !*

*Care falls, I know not why,
Within this anguished heart.
—Not for lost love I cry.—
It falls, and tells not why.*

*O cruel is the fate
That tells my heart no cause
Why, without love or hate,
So anguished is its fate.*

PAUL VERLAINE

A LEADEN OPIATE

(Un grand sommeil noir)

*A leaden opiate
Dulls my fire :
Gone, now, all hope,
Gone, all desire.*

*My eyes grow dim,
My memory fails,
Good and evil
Are far-off tales.*

*I am a cradle
Rocked to and fro
In the hush of a tomb
Of long ago.*

PAUL VERLAINE

THE ART OF POETRY

(*Art Poétique*)

To Charles Morice.

*Let music ever be your care,
And seek for it a varying mode
With naught to bind or overload
Its wandering converse with the air.*

*And when on words you meditate
Contrive to bend their sense awry :
Sweet is the vaporous melody
Where clear meets indeterminate.*

*It is the veil o'er peerless eyes,
It is the quivering noon-day light,
It is confusion's sparkling flight
Of stars down autumn's dewy skies.*

*Constant the need and absolute,
For Colour ? no, for subtlest Shade,
Within whose harmonies may fade
Dream into dream, horn into flute !*

*From murderous epigram forbear,
From unclean laughter, wit that rails ;
The weeping face of heaven bewails
The sordid garlic of such fare.*

*Take rhetoric and wring its neck !
And when your muse is soaring high*

THE ART OF POETRY

*Then curb the rhyme, for it may fly
To Heaven knows where, if not in check.*

*O who will sing of rhyme's misrule ?
What negro half-wit or deaf boy
Has forged for us this trumpery toy
Which jingles false beneath the tool ?*

*Music again, and everywhere !
Let your song be the winged delight
Wasted down from a soul in flight
To other skies, towards loves more fair.*

*Let all your poems and their lure
Be happy chances caught from hint
Of fresh morn sweet with thyme and mint . . .
And all the rest is Literature.*

PAUL VERLAINE

ARTHUR RIMBAUD

1854-1891

ARTHUR RIMBAUD

The author . . . has a fire in his eye, a fever in his blood, a maggot in his brain, a hectic flutter in his speech, which mark out the philosophic fanatic.

(Table-Talk : HAZLITT)

ARTHUR Rimbaud was born in 1854 at Charleville in the Ardennes. His father, a captain in the army, was of an entirely different temperament from his wife, who consequently lived chiefly with her own family at Charleville. The children, therefore, saw little of their father, but were brought up under the narrow efficiency of their religious, economical and despotic mother. In subjects which attracted him Rimbaud did well at school and at sixteen he was already writing poems of striking originality. His growth about this period was very rapid and accompanied by great mental and spiritual unrest. Charleville was too small and too unsympathetic for his quickened imagination. He was developing all the harshness and angularity of character and bearing common in people who are very much at odds with their environment. All the narrow fanatical force which he had inherited from his mother was fast going into rebellion, at first against his home life and discipline of any sort, and later against current ideas, so far as his avid, unsatisfied intellect could grasp them, in religion, politics, and literature. He negated everything in his world, except his own obsessing desire for self-expression in poetry. Three times he ran off to Paris, experiencing rebuff, hardship, and imprisonment. In 1871 he sent some of his poems,

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including the newly-finished *Bateau ivre* to Verlaine, and received a cordial invitation in reply. This was the beginning of a queer, close friendship between the two, in which each has been described, by different biographers, as the evil genius of the other. Verlaine opened up to Rimbaud the artistic life of Paris with its artificial stimulants and excitements. In the crowded cafés Rimbaud was silent when sober, aggressive at other times, and always critical of his company, for all of whom, except Verlaine, he had undisguised contempt. But alone with Verlaine he revealed the seething activities of an uncompromising mind, striving always to arrive at absolute values. To Verlaine, who was only too content with what the moment offered, this frenzied energy of rebellion was a continual fascination. Save for a few breaks the two led a Bohemian existence, at Verlaine's expense, in Paris, Belgium and London until 1873, when the revolver incident (see page 48, above) put a sudden end to the intimacy. This incident marks also the virtual end of Rimbaud's literary career. Even previous to it he had become dissatisfied with literature as a means of expression, and had been fired by the sight of London River with a thirst for adventure in a wider sphere. In his poetry and even more in his later prose, he had dared and challenged along lines more and more elliptic and remote. Now with abrupt disgust he forsook his own disdainful audacities. From a society whose foundations he denied and from writings in which had appeared only the most abstract synthesis of any reality, he turned to a restless practical life of adventure and vagabondage in Germany, Italy, Egypt,

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and, longest of all, in Abyssinia, where he was both explorer and trader. He amassed a considerable amount of money. In 1891 an accident to his knee brought him back to Marseilles, where he died after an amputation and much suffering. His poems were collected and published in 1895.

Rimbaud's features, with their mingled suggestion of childish beauty and savage audacity, have been described as those of 'an exiled angel.' His poetry, too, would seem to justify the phrase; for it shows a spirit so haughty in its rebellion that it achieves, even in its most vehement denials, contact with the sublime. Like his life, Rimbaud's poetry is full of strange, unlooked-for splendours. Literature came early across his path, and he swept through it like a whirlwind. The poetry which is the fragmentary record of this passage shows that Rimbaud laid a scornful hand on diverse and often unpromising material, that he drove onwards to expression with the terrific impetus and sharply focussed resolution of youth, that he was not afraid of lightning contrasts and bald transitions. Yet, in spite of these things, his work shows little sign of haste or lack of control. Poetically, he was least happy when his theme was humanity, for then his art was nurtured on a basis of rage and denunciation. Into it he threw an energy of caustic invective almost diabolical in its power to sear and scald. In all his work there is a latent feeling of proud contempt for the world. Only occasionally, as in the poems of his vagabondage, do softer feelings of pity and love shine through. *Bateau ivre* was his supreme projection of himself, his impas-

ARTHUR RIMBAUD

sioned cry towards the ocean, as yet unseen, but felt by him to be the appropriate symbol of his restless and adventurous spirit. Throughout it he maintained the afflatus of the first moment of inspiration. In its energy and ecstasy, its mastery of phrase and musical rhythm, it remains his greatest work. He strove in it, as in all his best work, to fuse the arts of poetry and music and painting into one vibrating whole. Unlike Verlaine, whose command of rhythm was perhaps no greater than his own, Rimbaud was a conscious innovator, lawless and unconfined. To his music, however soothing the strain, his ardent spirit gave an undertone of strength. He carried new ideas and methods of poetical technique much further than Verlaine ever dared to do, as in the assonances of *Les Chercheuses des Poux* or the free verse of *Le Mouvement*. And all these things he did before the age of twenty.

THE OUTSIDERS

(*Les Effarés*)

*Dark amid haze and snow-drift, bent
Above the mighty bakehouse-vent
 Warmly aglow,
They kneel, poor kids, with rounded rumps
And see the baker knead the lumps
 Of leaden dough.*

*They watch the white arms, strong and steady,
Which mould the loaves till they are ready
 For oven's glare.
They listen as the bread is grilling :
The baker smiles and goes on trilling
 An ancient air.*

*Cowering, without a sound, they wait
Above the vent-hole's murmuring grate
 Warm as a breast.
When for some revel of the night
The fancy batches come to sight
 All of the best,*

*When crickets and when fragrant crusts
Sing 'neath the chimney's smoky gusts
 As though naught matters,
How full of life the vent-hole seems,
The children's heart with rapture teems
 Under their tatters,*

THE OUTSIDERS

*They feel themselves so much in clover,
These Christmas babes, all frosted over,
That there they stay,
Glueing their little crimson faces
Against the grill and through its spaces
Grunting away*

*Like little pigs, far forward bending
With murmured prayers o'er this bright rending
Of heavenly skies,
So far, that soon they burst their breeches
And then the wind of winter reaches
To shirts and thighs.*

ARTHUR RIMBAUD

VAGRANT

(*Ma Bobème*)

*Wandering on, fists plunged to pocket-seams,
My very coat worn down to fantasy,
Beneath the skies, you, Muse, for company,
Hey nonny ! all love's splendours filled my dreams !*

*Trousers in holes ; and all the way romance
In rhymes bestrewn like pearls ; fancies enow
For any Tom-Thumb ; hostelry the Plough,
With, overhead, the swish of heaven's dance :*

*Harkening from my couch beside the road
To nights when sweet September dew bestowed
Upon me the strong wine of rapturous art,*

*And when mid shadowy dark fantastic things
I plucked, lyre for my rhymes, elastic strings
Of tattered boots, a foot against my heart !*

ARTHUR RIMBAUD

THE FRENZIED SHIP

(*Bateau ivre*)

*As down the slow impassive streams I came,
No longer had I mariners as guides :
They had been targets for the Red-Skins' aim,
To painted posts were nailed their naked hides.*

*Careless of all the mercantile parade,
Trading in English cotton, Flemish grain,
I left my seamen and their broils, and made
Down the unchallenging waters to the main.*

*Last year I sailed, deaf as with childish fear,
Before the furious clackings of the brine :
The mightiest promontories with straining gear
Ne'er lived through hurly-burly more divine.*

*The storm has blessed my watches with its spume,
And cork-like I have danced for ten dark nights
Above the eternal body-rolling fume,
Nor missed the sorry blinking of the lights.*

*Sweeter the virid water in my seams
Than luscious apple-flesh to childish hopes :
Spray, like blue wine, and vomit washed my beams
With quick snatch, fore and aft, at helm and ropes.*

*And long by the sweet lyric of the sea
Infused with stars, latescent, was I bound,
Poring upon its verdurous blues where, free,
Float the pale ravished bodies of the drowned,*

THE FRENZIED SHIP

*Where the slow-rhythmed ecstasies of day,
With sudden stain throughout the azure, move :
Headier than wine, vaster than music, they
Ferment the roseate bitterness of love.*

*I have seen lightnings riving heaven's face,
Surfs, currents, water-spouts ; evening's soft gleam
And mornings noble as some dove-like race :
Seen, too, such things as few men even dream ;*

*Seen low suns splashed with mystic infamy,
Illumining through clotted violet ;
And heard the chorus of old tragedy
In the far breakers' wonder-wounded fret ;*

*Conjured the seas' green depths, from whence arise
Slow kisses sparkling to the foam's far snow,
The alarms of blue and gold which phosphorus cries,
The unimagined stir of ocean's flow.*

*For long months I have sailed by coral rocks
Which cleft the swell to lines of plunging steers ;
And pondered how their snarling muzzle mocks
At Ocean's pantings and the Virgin's tears.*

*By unimagined Floridas I ran,
Brilliant with flowers and panthers' eyes, and gay
With barbarous hides and rainbows in whose span
'Neath far horizons glaucous cattle stray.*

THE FRENZIED SHIP

*And I have seen great nets within whose paunch
Rotted Leviathans ; seen fens dilate,
And distant waters into whirlpools launch ;
Seen, in a lull, sea's cataractic spate ;*

*Glaciers and nacrous waves, skies ember-showered,
Refulgent suns, grim wrecks in ocean's lees
Where elephantine reptiles, bug-devoured,
Beguiled with evil scents contorted trees.*

*Could I have shown some child those dolphins gay,
Those singing fish, those carp of gold delight !
Foam-flowers have graced me as I gathered way,
And winds ineffable have winged my flight.*

*Charming each plunge with moans, at times the sea,
Worn martyr weary of the pilgrim's share,
Raised its pale-chaliced, ghostly flowers to me ;
And I have lingered like a nun at prayer,*

*While land to me brought excrement and feud
Of wan-eyed sea-birds, peevishly distressed,
And while athwart my slender chains I viewed
The drowned sink down haphazardly to rest.*

*But I, forlorn wreck in the weeds' embrace,
Storm-hurled through ether far beyond all ken,
Whose sea-drunk carcass would have found no grace
In Monitors or Hanseatic men,*

THE FRENZIED SHIP

*Petulant, free, streaming with crimson haze,
Who pierced the blushing sky-walls on which time
Had fondly lavished for a poet's praise
Sun-silvered fungi and sky-azured slime,*

*Who, darkly zoned by sea-horse retinue,
Rode on, crazed raft, with phosphorescence splashed,
When the bright archways of the vaulted blue
Before July's swift cudgellings had crashed,*

*Who, shuddering, sensed desire's recurring hurt,
Far off, in Maelstroms' or Behemoths' moans,
Eternal truant on the blue inert,
I long for Europe and her ancient stones.*

*In night's Ægean many an island star
Beckons from magic skies. Within that sea
Of boundless void sleepest thou, exiled far,
O golden drift of wings, thou Might to be ?*

*Much I have suffered. The dawns lacerate,
Each moon is cruel, bitter each sun's sweep.
Slow, frenzied dreams from galling love dilate.
O that my keel might snap and plunge me deep !*

*Yet among Europe's waters I would see
The cold, dark pool 'neath evening's scented sky
Where, crouching low, a wistful child sets free
A boat as fragile as May butterfly.*

THE FRENZIED SHIP

*Bathed in your languors, Ocean, I shall glide
No longer past the cotton-trader's bulk,
Nor challenge oriflammes' and pennons' pride,
Nor brave the glaring eyes of prison-bulk.*

ARTHUR RIMBAUD

THE VERMIN-CHARMERS

(*Les Chercheuses des Poux*)

*When with red agonies about his brow
The child craves comfort of Lethean dreaming,
Over his bed two gentle sisters bow,
Their frail nail-silvered fingers palely gleaming.*

*They lay the child beside a casement, wide
To air whose azure bathes commingled flowers,
And through his heavy hair where dew-drops glide
The fine fierce fingers wield their wondrous powers.*

*He heeds their breathing with its sweet complaining
And bonied blossomings of rosy bliss,
The sudden gasp as though from lips restraining
Unwonted moisture or imagined kiss.*

*'Twixt beat of dusky lashes silence lingers
On scented air ; and mid the twilight ease
He hears the smooth electrifying fingers
Announce the crackling deaths of little fleas.*

*Lo, through his veins the wine of Sloth is pressing,
Like sighing bells preluding music's glow :
He feels beneath the even slow caressing
The eternal surge and swoon of childhood's woe.*

ARTHUR RIMBAUD

THE VOWELS

(Voyelles)

*Vowels, to your true colours here's the clue,
Ere I set forth your natal mysteries !
A, black : cavernous depths, dark backs of flies
That buzz and flash about earth's fuming brew.*

*E, white : proud thrust of glaciers, tents that strew
The desert, hoary kings, mist, the soft sighs
Of hemlock. I, red : spilt blood, derisive cries
Of angered beauty, flame of remorse o'erdue.*

*U, green : horizons, ocean's pulsing race,
Quiet of fields, quiet of wrinkled face
With eyes that pore on alchemy's dim night.*

*O, blue : strange Clarion thrilling human ears,
Vast silent tracks of Cherubim and Spheres,
The Omega, His Eyes' ethereal light.*

ARTHUR RIMBAUD

MOVEMENT

(Mouvement)

*The sinuous play of water upon the vessel's sides,
The surge about the stern,
The headlong drop,
The immeasurable streaming of the current
Lead on the voyagers by miracles of light
And strange new chemistries
Through wreaths of spray from ebbing wave
And whirling pool.*

*These are the conquerors of the world
Who would explore the science of their fate.
Beside them sport and comfort travel too.
Theirs is the voice
To whose tones race, class, prejudice must yield.
Quiet and ecstasy
Of deluged light,
Of racking studious nights.*

*And from their talk, mid tackle, blood, flowers, fire, jewels,
From sayings flung to the flying ship,
Emerges, like a monstrous sea-wall in the pathway of
hydraulic motion,
Steadfastly shining, their philosophic store ;
They, driving onwards to the harmonies and raptures
And heroisms of discovery.*

MOVEMENT

*Thus, mid bewildering atmospheric chances,
The two, with youth aflame, remain apart,
—Is it some ancient, innocent, untamed shyness in them ?—
Motionless, singing.*

ARTHUR RIMBAUD

JULES LAFORGUE

1860-1887

JULES LAFORGUE

*'Has some Vast Imbecility
Mighty to build and blend,
But impotent to tend,
Framed us in jest, and left us now to hazardry ?'*
(*Nature's Questioning* : THOMAS HARDY)

JULES Laforgue was born in 1860 of French parents at Montevideo (Uruguay) where his father was a teacher. At the age of six he was brought across the Atlantic to be educated at Tarbes, his father's old home. There, with his elder brother, he remained until he was fifteen, haunted already by the sense of loneliness and nostalgia which was to possess him through life. In 1876 his parents returned to settle in Paris. There Jules attended the Lycée Condorcet until 1879. In the following year the family removed to Tarbes, and Jules was left alone to commence his literary career. He studied hard, reading philosophy and æsthetics. He was very poor and yet more desperately lonely ; for the deep vein of sentiment in him was outmatched by an inexorable idealism, while a reserve, inherited perhaps from his Breton mother, held him from even superficial expansiveness. Yet beneath his distant, sober manner—'un peu clergyman,' it has been said—there burned in him a consuming thirst for all the half-sensed possibilities of life. He turned to a favourite sister for sympathy, writing her long letters in which melancholy was already tricked out in a garb of whimsical utterance. Then, lonely ascetic, he was caught on the wave of pessimistic

JULES LAFORGUE

philosophy which left its mark on many of the poets of his generation. He saw the world in the grip of an evolution, unconscious and irrational, against whose fatal and universal necessity there was no appeal. In 1881 the joint influence of M. Paul Bourget, the novelist, and M. Charles Ephrussi, the art-critic, obtained for him an appointment at the German Court as reader to Augusta, the Russian wife of the Emperor Wilhelm I. Laforgue thereupon entered on a new life of luxury and leisure. The world of art and letters lay open to him. But growth with him still remained a secret process—he guarded his inner life jealously and spoke to no one of his poetry. A year passed over him, thus self-imprisoned; and then love roused this Hamlet from his speculations. ‘L’aventure R.,’ as he records it, was with a lady of the Court circle, beautiful and cultured. And as if the dissolution of his Platonism were not enough, this love-passage bore with it a train of rapid and torturing developments. The notes are reticent; but in them ‘Scène avec R.’ occurs more than once. By the summer of 1883 it was over. Laforgue returned to his poetry, adjusting more carefully his habitual mask of irony and detachment. In 1885 *Les Complaintes* were published in Paris, after which he became absorbed in the lunar landscapes and philosophical pierrots of *L’Imitation de Notre-Dame-la-Lune*. He took up, too, the study of English, for the sake, perhaps, of those Shakespearean affinities of which he had long been aware. He took lessons in pronunciation from Miss Leah Lee, to whom after a few months of silent, delicate devotion, he became engaged.

JULES LAFORGUE

His affection roused him to a new decisiveness and power of action. His hesitations and melancholies dissolved, and he arrived at a fuller and happier acceptance of life. But Miss Lee was consumptive and could not live among the fogs of Berlin. So Laforgue gave up his appointment at the Court and they were married in London in January 1887. Laforgue prepared to continue his literary work. But in Paris, where they settled, poverty closed down on them and with it came ill-health even for Laforgue, who had neglected a chill. In August 1887 he died, to be followed a year later by his wife.

Laforgue is the most intellectual of the Symbolist poets and the most modern. From the first he gives evidence of an astonishing aptitude for abstract thought. The early poems of *Le Sanglot de la Terre* are the work of one fevered with metaphysical theory and possessed by a cruelly acute sense of the ephemeral and incomplete in life. His later work is more psychological, and into it he strives to bring the hazard of subconscious mental association. His manner becomes very bizarre, even in his adaptations of the popular ballad. To his metaphysical themes he adds that of love, treated in the modern way, watched over and dissected by an exasperated intelligence. His poems are often difficult. Each is so light, so elliptic, so full of epigram and irony. And in almost all the paramount spirit is that of relativity. By *Les Derniers Vers* he becomes one of the initiators of French 'vers libre,' using freely rhyme, assonance and alliteration. At this time, too, he begins to be less at the mercy of the winds of doctrine, more

JULES LAFORGUE

meditative, more lyrical, and also more finely analytical than ever of the contradictory reactions of his jangling nerves. In varying tones, disquieting, reserved, erotic, he discourses still on the themes of melancholy and love. But it seems likely that, had it not been for his early death, he might soon have left the field of abstract theorizing for one in which his art would have more direct bearing upon life.

COMPLAINT OF THE ORGANIST OF NOTRE-DAME AT NICE

(Complainte de l'Organiste de Notre-Dame de Nice)

*Already flocks of wintering rooks
Caw out their chants about the tower,
Soon will the rains of autumn lour,
And then farewell, Casino nooks.*

*Yesterday paler she did grow,
Her body shook, numb through and through,
All in this church is ice-cold too,
I alone love her here below.*

*And I would slash my heart away
To win one smile's disconsolate mirth !
Upon this all-triumphant earth
Faithful to her I'll ever stay.*

*The day she quits mortality
A Miserere shall vibrate
So cosmically desperate
That God will surely answer me.*

*No, here I'll spend what time remains
True to my love, the prey of phthisis,
And lull each hypertrophic crisis
With Bach's undying fugal strains.*

COMPLAINT OF THE ORGANIST OF NOTRE-DAME

*And each year when that day has birth
For us, while others hear in vain,
My Requiem I will unchain
That sounds the passing of the Earth !*

JULES LAFORGUE

SONNET FOR A FAN

(Sonnet pour Evantail)

*Stupendous ! that without one thought of me,
Sowing through infinite space each wandering world
From out whose fecund dust new planets whirled,
Slowly has rolled a whole eternity !*

*Thus evermore ! Though I in night recaught
Renounce my brief existence, there each sphere
Proceeds upon its measureless career
Serene as in the day when I was naught.*

*But time to see that all on earth is ill,
That vain it is to seek the cosmic soul,
That we must bow to life's mysterious power,*

*And that—brief wave on waters vast and still,
Sob lost in space, flash in heaven's empty bowl—
Man, 'twixt two voids, is but an anguished hour.*

JULES LAFORGUE

COMPLAINT OF THE KING OF THULÉ

(Complainte du Roi de Thulé)

*A king there was of Thulé, great,
Immaculate,
Who, far from love and all its poses,
Pondered the metempsychoses,
Lilies to roses,
In regal state.*

*His flowers asleep, he turned away,
His keys a-play,
To broider, to the stars' delight,
Upon a tower, a Veil so light,
Of colour bright,
'Neath heaven's whey.*

*And when the veil was hemmed about,
From Thulé out
He rowed across the waters dire
Towards the sun's agonizing fire,
Enchanted Spire !
With eerie shout :*

*' Dying Sun, to-day you tossed
Once again your torch above
The viviparous holocaust
Of the cult that men call Love.*

*' Now when at length your faltering flood
Ebbs before the night's cobalt,*

COMPLAINT OF THE KING OF THULÉ

*With a last flow of martyr-blood
You lave the threshold of the Vault.*

*' O Sun, I will myself descend
Mid your ice-palaces' dread curse,
And there your bleeding heart will nurse ;
 Within this Holy Shroud I'll tend
 It without end.'*

*He spoke, and then, with Veil out-raught,
 All distraught,
Towards sunken ship and coral reef,
Heedless of mockery or grief,
 Beautiful beyond belief,
 His way he sought.*

*True lovers, turn your keys, when late
 The stars await !
Lest a chill shade of guileless love
With wailing strain your hearts may move :
' A king there was of Thulé, great,
 Immaculate . . . '*

JULES LAFORGUE

COMPLAINT: THE EVENING OF THE AGRICULTURAL ASSEMBLIES

(Complainte du soir des Comices agricoles)

*Once more two hunting-horns with royal sound
Spread echoes round
That quest about o'erhead till they in turn are drowned.*

*Quickly, quickly, clowns and louts,
Bold and boastful be your bouts !*

*And when the morning breaks, as soon it must,
Rough arms out-thrust
Plunge again into thankless toil mid dung and dust.*

*Quickly, quickly, go your ways,
All days are not holidays !*

*The violin, neglected, weeps on all,
Far from the ball ;
The cornet to the Ideal faintly risks a call . . .*

*But the flageolet's brisk strife,
Calls you, quick, both man and wife !*

*A couple wanders on where crickets rest,
Where plough has pressed ;
The girl is listening and torturing the locket on her breast.*

*Let be, let be, O hunting-horn,
For to this fate the race is born.*

COMPLAINT

*The sweet-voiced horns are dumb, while, far away,
Among the hay,
Heedless of mayor or clerk, two foolish dreams fall into
swift decay.*

*Drink then, good folks, and dance with mirth,
All's a sad Mystery on this old Earth.*

*—Ah ! who the First driven by insensate chance
Into the dance
On a young world flung through the Unknown like a lance ?*

*O Earth, O Earth, O human kind,
You breed much suffering in my mind.*

JULES LAFORGUE

SPACE

(*Au large*)

*Far into space night and its shades commune,
Big with translucent calm infinity.
No troubling echo of humanity
To break the hush 'neath Mediterranean Moon !*

*Behold the Cipher set in pallid ore,
Behold the Wafer in the Holy Place,
Sole aid the Incomprehensible to face,
Sole word of worth in all our foolish store !*

*Beyond the catchwords of antiquity,
Beyond our tears, denials, reasonings,
See how the Moon, unchallenged, upward swings,
See the one infinite soliloquy !*

*And you, poor little Earth, a bubbling pot
Seething with schemes to build up rubric saws
From damaged scraps of the Dynamic Laws,
Ah, yours is but a sedentary lot !*

JULES LAFORGUE

FIVE-MINUTE WATER-COLOUR

(Aquarelle en cinq minutes)

Ophelia : 'Tis brief, my lord.

Hamlet : As woman's love.

*Ah me ! the skies are overcast,
The storm's not far away ;
And see, where now the labourers fast
Are bringing in the hay ! . . .*

*The blister breaks !
The air awakes
To the scud
Of the flood ! . . .*

*And O these tarentellas
Of umbrellas !*

*O Nature
Draggled creature ! . . .*

*Outside my pane
A fuchsia,
Poor pariah,
Revives again . . .*

JULES LAFORGUE

AUTUMN, THE FRIEND !

(Le brave, brave Automne !)

*When autumn comes again
To play its dismal part
I'll welcome in its pain
From the point of view of art.*

*The wind, ah yes, I know it ;
Since ever I was born
It's been my friend ; I owe it
Those shudderings forlorn. . . .*

*And the snow that downward flings
Like my flesh is part of me ;
Defence to me it brings
'Gainst flesh I fain would see . . .*

*The melancholy sun
Looks down on me with dole
Because he has begun
To worry o'er my soul . . .*

*And nothing can restrain
My spleen from wandering where
The myriad drops of rain
Fill with their spleen the air. . . .*

*Yes, autumn's mine, and I
Belong to it, amen !*

AUTUMN, THE FRIEND

As all belongs to ' Why ? '
And the world to ' And then ? '

When autumn comes again
To play its dismal part
I'll welcome in its pain
From the point of view of art.

JULES LAFORGUE

NOTES

GÉRARD DE NERVAL.

Artemis.

Aristide Marie in his book, *Gérard de Nerval*, writes of this sonnet : ‘ And finally, was it not also in the mirages of his madness that he beheld those visions of Artemis, visions which soon were to people *Le Rêve et la Vie*, phantoms from the ecstasy of an Initiate, ghosts from the cabbala of the Orient,—the soul journeying through many avatars, the goddess Isis or the Christian Virgin, the Queen of Sheba or *Death*,—through all, *Aurelia* ?’

El Desdichado.

El Desdichado, the Disinherited.

Aristide Marie gives the following account of this poem : ‘ Mid the mournful lyrism to which these memories led, his Muse returned to visit him : “ She entered into my heart,” he said, “ like a goddess whose words are golden ; she escaped from it like a Pythia, uttering cries of anguish.” But the despairing accents which she inspired were of so singular a beauty that, when reason returned, he was filled with regret for the hours of delirium that had given to him so rare a mistress.—Thus it was that on a night of blazing madness he handed in to the office of *Le Mousquetaire* that black diamond, *El Desdichado*, which Dumas, dazzled, hastened to put next day before the eyes of his readers.’

Lusignan and Biron are the names of two ancient and aristocratic French families. The beautiful Hôtel Biron in Paris has now become the Musée Rodin.

STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ

The Noon-day of a Faun.

At the suggestion of Théodore de Banville this poem was written in 1875 for declamation by Coquelin the elder, but was never given public performance. It was even refused for publication in *Le Parnasse contemporain*, edited by Mallarmé’s friends. In 1876 it was issued, however, in brochure, with frontispiece and three vignettes by Manet.

Sir Edmund Gosse offers a prose description of this poem (‘ Symbolism and M. Stéphane Mallarmé ’ in *Questions at Issue*), to which he refers as ‘ this famous miracle of unintelligibility.’ Of Mallarmé’s work more

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generally the same critic writes : ' He aims at illusion only ; he wraps a mystery around his simplest utterance ; the abstruse and the symbolic are his peculiar territory. His aim, or I greatly misunderstand him, is to use words in such harmonious combinations as will suggest to the reader a mood or a condition which is not mentioned in the text, but is nevertheless paramount in the poet's mind at the moment of composition. . . . ' And this estimate Mallarmé has, in his turn, characterized as ' a miracle of divination.'

Claude Debussy's *Prélude à l'Après-Midi d'un Faune*, by translating the poem into a medium which transcends barriers of race and language, has given it an international renown.

What silken Symbol æons-old . . .

Remy de Gourmont in *La Culture des Idées* has said of Mallarmé's more obscure poems : ' A reasonable interpretation is always possible ; it will change, perhaps, according to the mood, as the sheen on the grass changes according to the light ; but truth, here as elsewhere, is inseparable from the emotion of the hour. The verse of Mallarmé is the most marvellous pretext for reflection that has yet been given to a race tired beneath a weight of useless assertion.' Amid the many subtle suggestions of this sonnet, one of the more important is, perhaps, the idea that satisfaction, for the poet, may come by stifling the impulse towards action and retaining in its purity the fervour of contemplation.

PAUL VERLAINE.

Now is rapture's languorous mood . . . and

Care falls upon my heart. . . .

These two poems belong to the ' Ariettes oubliées ' of *Romances sans paroles*, and were, therefore, written in London. Claude Debussy set them to music in a series entitled ' Ariettes oubliées.'

Moonlight.

This poem also inspired Debussy.

ARTHUR RIMBAUD.

The Frenzied Ship.

In *La Vie aventureuse de Jean-Arthur Rimbaud*, M. Jean-Marie Carré writes thus of *Bateau ivre* and its author : ' In this poem, surging freely as the tide, he foretells, through a symbol ever enriched and ever extended, his

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own legendary and pathetic destiny ; to see all, feel, exhaust, explore, say all. Towards the unimagined, the invisible, the unnamable, he is drawn by his passionate, savage curiosity.'

The Vermin-Charmers and

The Vowels.

These two poems are said to have been written after visits to the Louvre in Paris, where Rimbaud's desire to create a poetical language satisfying to all the senses at once was fortified by what he saw around him. The desire itself was not, of course, new, for it is latent in Baudelaire's line

Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent.

Movement.

This is believed to be one of the earliest poems in free verse in the French language. The example which Rimbaud here set of making each line a separate unit has been followed by many French vers-libristes. More recently the principle involved has been recognized as an essential in all good free verse.

The occasion of the poem is the voyage of Verlaine and Rimbaud to England.

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